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ABSTRACT

One hundred twenty-four prospective teachers completed a survey instrument at a small midwestern university on their beliefs about teaching. One premise of the survey was that prospective teachers are inclined to teach as they have been taught. Questions were raised on whether teacher educators teach a balanced view to men and women or reflect the old style of masculine dominance; in effect, teaching men to be different from women teachers and vice versa. This paper reflects on some of these basic differences and raises more questions concerning beliefs about teaching. Data from the survey are summarized, and the survey questionnaire is appended. (Author/JD)

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THE FUTURE OF EDUCATION: THE NATURE OF BELIEFS ABOUT TEACHING

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THE FUTURE OF EDUCATION: THE NATURE OF
BELIEFS ABOUT TEACHING

Every teacher has his/her own beliefs about why students perform and behave as they do. These private beliefs serve as the basis for certain practices the teacher uses in the classroom. According to Wirsing (1972), a teacher's methodology reflects his/her basic assumptions. Consciously or unconsciously, a teacher makes a myriad of decisions each day based on his/her particular stock of underlying beliefs. Armstong (1973) indicates that beliefs are our interpretation of reality and that they are our maps for action. We develop these cognitive maps in the light of how we are prepared to act (which differs with male and female, I think). Combs and others (1974) state that a teacher behaves effectively only in terms of what he/she believes is so. The action of good teachers is guided by the purposes and goals determined for the class.

Accurate understanding about people and their behavior is dependent on what a teacher believes. The beliefs teachers have regarding pupils will be evident in the behavior a teacher exhibits with students, i.e., 1) whether they are more concerned with people and their reactions or with things; 2) whether they are more concerned with perceptual experiences or more objective facts or whether or not they have an internal or external frame of reference. How they look upon people makes a difference; i.e., do they see students as able or unable; worthy or unworthy; dependable or undependable, or friendly or unfriendly? perhaps the single most important belief a teacher has of students is whether or not they are trustworthy and capable of developing the best that is in them. If they do not believe students are trustworthy, they

will adopt practices that will keep the student from engaging in self-directed learning.

Teachers' beliefs and behaviors are always determined by the purposes they have in mind. What teachers perceive to be their own and society's purposes make a great deal of difference in their own behavior. A major task of a teacher education program is to help a prospective teacher explore his/her own beliefs and purposes to arrive at an understanding of these in such a personal way so that they become a part of his/her very being. The methods teachers use " fit the kind of people they are".

The development of beliefs about people is not learned from meaningless accumulation and memorization of minutia. Beliefs and understandings are always applied to particular persons. An individual's beliefs are also affected by the philosophy and values of those around him, and in particular, their teacher.

Some definitions of teaching:

1. A series of decision making tasks (diagnosing needs and prescribing a remedy from a pharmacy of alternatives)
   (Bruce and Harootunian)

2. Helping students learn to learn and to help them maintain the desire to continue to develop as lifelong learners. An ideal learning set would be one in which students work with rather than depend upon. (Heck and Williams)

3. Helping students to learn; facilitate change and to see that learning is a process for living, not a preparation for the future. (John Dewey)

4. An activity that is not dominated by prescriptions or routines but is influenced by qualities and contingencies that are unpredicted. (Gage)

5. Dynamic interaction of individuals (teachers and teachers, teachers and learners, learners and learners----with materials, institutions, society) in which decisions constantly are being made by all concerned. As teachers plan for instructional

> interaction, they consistently and in most cases intuitively make critical choices. (Orlich, etal, 1985)

The process of making decisions is like conducting research in that the teacher must constantly reach out to gather data about students, themselves and the interdependent context they find themselves in. Effective"decision-ers " find they need a repertoire of alternatives and solutions to problems from which to choose. All teaching-learning processes (formal or informal) takes place within a given context. The context of any given classroom creates effects that are multi-dimensional, simultaneous and most likely, unpredictable. Teacher education cannot provide the answers to specific problems of teachers since the problems are unique to the moment-to-moment context.

The teacher, as a professional decision-maker, must be able to consider the many variables existing at any particular moment. The underlying basic beliefs a teacher has about students, about teaching and about the world come immediately into play. All behavior is purposive, therefore all beliefs are important in determining behavior.

Teachers' beliefs relate to students in how they view the nature of persons, i.e., are students basically neutral creatures? Are persons inherently evil? Are persons in an on-going flux (developmental)? Do teachers see their students as a collection of willful, active stubborn creatures who need firm control or do they see students as passive, pliable creatures who must be shaped into a smooth harmonious group? Does the teacher type his/her class with words such as slow, average, or fast learners? Or does the teacher approach the students with no stereotypes at all? Does he/she approach each class without preconceived notions

and let the class and each individual student react naturally?

Teachers who feel society needs self-motivated people who are divergent thinkers make academic decisions based on these beliefs. These decisions then help pupils to acquire these characteristics. Conversely, if a teacher values conformity and established rules, they are likely to require unquestioning conformity.

An effective and successful teacher is a person who possesses the human qualities of caring, loving, respecting, trusting and understanding (Heck and Williams, 1984). A person with this type of belief includes an understanding and awareness of the developmental needs of learners and the moment-to-moment specificity that affects them. Teachers probably need to adapt and tailor instruction to specific needs of students on any particular day.

Teaching is leadership with an integration of a variety of roles which lead to unleashing the human potential of each student. Wehling and Charters (1969) isolated eight factors involved in beliefs about teaching. These were subject matter emphasis, personal adjustment ideology, student autonomy versus teacher control, emotional disengagement, consideration of student viewpoint, classroom order, student challenge and integrative learning. Ross (1979) studied the role of teacher beliefs in teaching practice by studying the four factors of clarity of beliefs, awareness of alternatives and the ability to perceive connections between beliefs and practices and teaching context . She found that beliefs do have an impact.

The author (Kreutzkampf, 1978) studied conceptual systems as a predictor of beliefs about teaching, especially the emphasis on short-

range versus long-range consequences of teaching and the relative-absolute nature of beliefs about teaching. There was evidence that as the conceptual maturity increases, there is more of an emphasis on long-range consequences of teaching. No support was found for the idea that relativity of beliefs increased as conceptual complexity increased.

In the winter of 1985, a study was conducted for the purpose of ascertaining whether preservice students who were planning on being teachers had defined beliefs. One hundred twenty four (124) persons completed the survey instrument (adapted from Wehling and Charters, 1969, and used by Kreutzkampf, 1978). There were 37 males and 87 females who finished the survey. The data from this study follows. Note some of the interesting numbers (means). The numbers at the right indicate the subject matter which most disagrees or agrees with the identified statement.

Some questions to ponder:

1. Are women more interested in teaching skills and factual info as the function of the schools?

3. Are men more wanting students to always be alert?

7. Do men want classrooms to be free of distractions more than women?

8. Are women more amenable to have students understand "general significance" ?

10. Are women more interested in interdisciplinary and "broadening perspectives"?

11. Women appear more prone to have students participate?

12. Do men push "doing a job well?"

14. Do men push for more control?

22. Do men insist on students being kept busy more than women?

23. Do men insist that students can only do good work when they know what to expect?

25. Are women more interested in giving help for socio-emotional problems?

26. Are men more interested in "covering" the material?

33. Women more prone to let students "set their own pace" in learning?

40. Do men think across the school routine is restrictive?

Long-range concerns:

9. Are women less prone to rely on a textbook (more free to add or detract)?

10. Do women feel more comfortable expanding the information?

27. Are women more prone to relate information to the "broader problems of the world"?

39. Do women tend to let students have more problem solving--of their own choice?

40. Do men feel "consistency across" school is restrictive?

The beliefs that we as teacher educators hold are probably pervasive . Students teach as they have been taught. Are we allowing prospective teachers work out their own beliefs? Are we clinging to the old style of masculine dominance? It is something to think about and ponder hard. Do our beliefs actually take in both the male and female viewpoint? Are we as men or women partial to the "same" sex, or do we make it hard for the"same"sex to achieve?

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APPENDIX A

N= 124

M= 37

F= 87

BELIEFS ABOUT THE TEACHING PROCESS

(adaptation of L. Wehling and W.W. Charter's instrument,1969)

The following statements indicate a belief that teachers have concerning the teaching process. You are asked to respond to these statements to the degree that you endorse these beliefs. Please indicate your belief by putting the number corresponding to your degree of belief on the line in front of the statement. Degrees of endorsement are:

1. Strongly agree
2. Agree
3. Mildly agree
4. Mildly disagree
5. Disagree
6. Strongly disagree

In the event that you cannot endorse one of the six alternatives listed for each statement, tell why you cannot agree or disagree with it. Please write directly on this instrument----just below or after the statement.

3.139 1. Teaching of specific skills and factual subject matter is the most important function of the school.

M = 3.486 F = 2.988

Least agree- H E 4.25
Most agree- Science 3.25

2.959 2. Learning is essentially a process of increasing one's store of information about various fields of knowledge.

3.027 2.929

Science, Soc. St. 3.0
I.A. 1.75

3.103 3. Students learn to stay alert when they are expected to respond immediately to teacher demands.

2.889 3.213

Home Ec. 4.15
Art 2.13

1.973 4. Students learn best in an atmosphere filled with love and emotional support.

2.161 1.901

Soc. St. 2.65
Eng/Comm 1.38

2.260 5. The curriculum consists of subject matter to be learned and skills to be acquired.

2.2 2.286

Science 2.67
Art 1.25

4.122 6. A good teacher will establish a routine and stick to it.

4.035 4.161

Health/PE 4.57
Art 2.5

2.973 7. Optimum learning takes place when the classroom setting is completely free of distraction.

2.706 3.089

H.E. 4.0
Science 2.125

PAGE2

DEGREES OF ENDORSEMENT:

1. Strongly agree
2. agree
3. mildly agree
4. mildly disagree
5. disagree
6. Strongly disagree

2.916 8. The basic function of education is fulfilled only when students are led to understand the general significance of the material they have learned.

3.214 2.810 Art, Math 3.25 Eng/Comm 2.0

3.29 9. The teacher must avoid strict adherence to the sequence provided by a textbook series.

3.85 3.082 Eng/Comm 4.6 Art 1.75

2.777 10. The deep interest which students sometimes develop in one subject can be valuable to them, but only if teachers succeed in broadening their perspectives across subject matter boundaries.

3.139 2.624 Eng/Comm 4.63 Art 1.55

2.288 11. Teachers increase their chances of directing the work into productive channels by having students participate in the planning.

2.588 2.167 Math 3.14 Art 1.62

3.037 12. Students gain more satisfaction from doing a difficult task well than from any other achievement.

2.788 3.149 ELED 3.14 Art. 2.125

2.319 13. Students gain better understanding of the subject if assignments are presented to them as a series of interrelated problems.

2.189 2.380 El Ed 2.62 Soc St. 2.0 (Eng. 2.05)

3.149 14. Proper control of a class is amply demonstrated when students work quietly while the teacher is out of the room.

2.938 3.237 HE 4.0 Ind. A 1.5

3.287 15. Students respect teachers who expect them to work hard in school.

3.125 2.862 H.E. 4.75 Soc. St. 2.125

3.9298 16. Student failure is averted when mastery of the subject matter is the prime requisite for promotion.

3.971 3.911 Math 4.2 (ELED 4.13) Science 2.71 (HE- 2.63)

1.975 17. The effectiveness of teaching is enhanced when the teacher has the ability to see the world as each of his students sees it.

1.972 1.976 HE 3.4 Eng/Comm 1.37

PAGE 3 DEGREES OF ENDORSEMENT:

1. Strongly agree
2. Agree
3. Mildly agree
4. Mildly disagree
5. Disagree
6. Strongly Disagree

2.144 18. Group activity teaches students to think and plan together, independent of direct supervision by the teacher.

2.171 2.108 H E 2.25
ELED 1.86 (Art 1.87)

3.609 19. There is too great an emphasis on keeping order in the classroom.

3.583 3.620 Soc. St. 4.5
H.E. 2.9

4.598 20. The teacher who organizes the material and presents it to students in a forceful way gets the best results.

4.467 4.653 Eng/Comm 4.9
Soc St. 3.5

2.189 21. Learning is enhanced when the accomplishments of students are praised generously by the teacher.

2.029 2.268 Science 2.84
IA. 1.2

3.524 22. Students must be kept busy or they soon get into trouble.

3.242 3.653 H E. 3.75
Eng/Comm 2.33

2.850 23. Students do their best work when they know exactly what to expect from day to day.

2.353 3.063 Science 3.16 (Math 3.0)
IA 1.75

3.165 24. The backbone of the school curriculum is subject matter; activities are useful mainly to facilitate the learning of subject matter.

3.389 3.063 Math 3.14
IA 2.25 (Soc St 2.38)

2.931 25. The teacher assures optimum learning conditions by giving top priority to the social-emotional needs of the students.

3.257 2.825 Math 3.83
Science 2.67 and ELEM 2.43

2.843 26. In teaching it is quite essential to cover the material in the course of study.

2.457 3.012 Science 3.37
IA 1.75 and PE/Health 1.83

2.929 27. Students never really understand a subject until they can relate what they have learned to the broader problems of the world.

2.972 2.938 Soc. St. 3.75
Math 2.29

2.649 28. A well established classroom routine enhances the emotional stability of students.

2.714 2.618 Soc St. 2.25 and HE 2.34
Art 1.75

DEGREES OF ENDORSEMENT:

1. Strongly agree
2. Agree
3. Mildly agree
4. Mildly disagree
5. Disagree
6. Strongly disagree

3.950 29. Before students are encouraged to exercise independent thought they should be thoroughly grounded in the facts and knowledge about the subject.

3.912 3.965 Eng/Comm 5.0
IA 3.0 and Science 3.3

2.526 30. The student's knowledge is best developed when teachers interrelate facts and figures from many different subject matter fields.

2.444 2.562 PE?Health and Soc. St. 3.0
IA 2.0

3.621 31. Students who misbehave or do not learn are generally children who need love.

3.630 3.618 Soc. St. 4.34
Science 2.87

3.094 32. The effective teacher has complete control of the learning situation at all times.

3.194 3.049 Eng/Comm 4.12 and HE 4.15
ELED 2.49

3.706 33. Students learn best when permitted to set their own pace in doing the work.

4.333 3.48 Eng/comm 4.75 and Soc St. 4.67
Art 2.125

2.45 34. Students learn self direction by having opportunities to set their own goals for learning.

2.618 2.384 IA 3.0 and Math 2.93
Art 1.75 and Soc. St. 1.84

2.828 35. The logical structure of subject matter is the most realistic guide to the organization of the work in the classroom.

2.8 2.840 HE 3.33 and Art 3.0
IA 2.25 and Math 2.43

1.603 36. Establishing the rules well in advance strengthens the teacher's hand in meeting the various problems that might arise.

1.722 1.553 Art 1.75 and HE, Soc. St. 1.6)
Eng/comm and Pe?health 1.23

3.991 37. The overall plan of education suffers when teachers depart substantially from the subject outline.

3.844 4.054 Art 4.88
Eng/comm 4.5 low= Soc St. 3.0

3.441 38. Students frequently learn much more under their own initiative than they do under teacher direction.

3.429 3.448 Soc. St. 4.25
Art 3.0 and ELED 3.34

PAGE 5 DEGREES OF ENDORSEMENT:

1. Strongly agree
2. Agree
3. Mildly agree
4. Mildly disagree
5. Disagree
6. Strongly disagree

3.130 39. Nothing captures student's interests in school work as quickly as allowing them to wrestle with problems of their own choosing.

3.297 3.051 Soc. St. 3.75
Art , HE 3.12 and Math 3.15

3.297 40. Across the school routine imposes a consistency in classroom procedure which tends to restrict important avenues for learning.

3.089 3.403 Math, IA 3.25
Art 2.0

2.319 41. Small group work uses the contrasting personalities, skills and interests students have to best advantage.

2.324 2.316 P.E./health 2.59 and Art 2.63
Soc. St. 2.0

2.864 42. Lessons presented in the form of problems to be solved are the best means for motivating students.

3.029 2.789 P.E/ health 4.0
Art 1.88 and Soc. St. 2.17

3.68 43. Children should be given more freedom in the classroom than they usually get.

3.688 3.676 Eng/comm 4.5
P.E./health 3.22 and ELED 3.4

2.948 44. The effectiveness of the teacher depends entirely on the amount of personal interest he can invest in the progress of each student.

3.121 2.878 Soc. St. 4.67
Art 2.0 and Science 2.33

2.102 45. The pupil's impression of the teacher's personality greatly influences what he learns.

2.056 2.122 Soc. St. 2.75 and Eng/comm 2.5
Art 1.25